



Information UPDATE

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction/Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent/P.O. Box 7841/ Madison, WI 53707-7841

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TO: District Administrators, CESA Administrators, CCDEB Administrators,
Directors of Special Education and Pupil Services, and Other Interested Parties

FROM: Carolyn Stanford Taylor, Assistant State Superintendent
Division for Learning Support: Equity and Advocacy

SUBJECT: Wisconsin Schools Facilitate Parent Involvement

The Wisconsin State Performance Plan (SPP) represents the department's six-year plan for improving outcomes of children with disabilities in Wisconsin. One of the twenty indicators in the SPP, Indicator 8, is a measurement of schools' efforts to involve parents. School districts collect data for Indicator 8 by conducting a uniform survey of parents of children with disabilities. Each school district in the state conducts the survey once during a six-year cycle. At the end of the 2007-08 school year, three years of the cycle were completed.

The survey tallies the percent of parents with a child receiving special education services who agreed that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities. In 2006, the first year that the survey was given, 72.04% of parents agreed their children's schools facilitated parent involvement. This number provided the baseline upon which improvement on Indicator 8 is measured and reported to the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). A stakeholder group, representing parents, teachers, administrators, school boards and others, set targets for each of the years that school districts will conduct the survey. The targets are:

- 2007 : 72.3% (Actual results show that 73.57 % of parents agreed that schools facilitated parent involvement)
- 2008: 76.1%
- 2009: 79.9%
- 2010: 83.7%
- 2011: 87.5%

The 20 items on the survey the department analyzes to obtain the percentage describe communication practices between schools and parents, as well as practices that convey to parents they are equal partners with schools in their children's education. "When families are welcomed and treated with respect, honored for their contributions, and connected to teachers, other parents and what's happening in the classroom, they become motivated to be involved over the long-term, in ways that can improve their children's success in school." This is one of the big stories coming out of studies over the past 30 years that researcher Anne Henderson relayed to the United States Senate in 2007. The all-important relationship between families and schools has been reflected in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) since its inception.

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IDEA 1997 and 2004 strengthened the role of parents of children with disabilities and ensured families have meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education. Since 1998, federal monitoring priorities for improving educational results for children have recognized parents and families are pivotal to children's learning and must be partners with schools in educational decision-making.

The final target for Indicator 8 is that at least 87.5 % of parents will agree with all of the analyzed items on the survey. The 2007 results show 87.5% to 96% of parents in agreement with more than half of the items on the survey. Parents perceive teachers are available to speak with them, offer a variety of ways to communicate, and provide understandable written information. Parents agree they are treated as equal partners and team members in planning their children's programs. The items that did not reach at least 87.5% agreement, in both 2006 and 2007, included specific practices in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process as well as advanced communication practices. Those items were:

- At the IEP meeting, we discussed how my child would participate in statewide assessments.
- Written justification was given for the extent my child would not receive services in the regular classroom.
- The school communicates regularly with me regarding my child's progress on IEP goals.
- I have been asked for my opinion about how well preschool special education services are meeting my child's needs.
- People from preschool special education, including teachers and other service providers, give me options concerning my child's services and supports.
- Teachers and administrators ensure I have fully understood the Procedural Safeguards (the rules in federal law that protect the rights of parents).
- Teachers and administrators seek out parent input.
- Teachers and administrators show sensitivity to the needs of students with disabilities and their families.
- The school explains what options parents have if they disagree with a decision of the school.

More than 1,300 parents across Wisconsin have responded to the survey. While the vast majority applauded the partnership practices of schools, the items listed must receive attention in order for Wisconsin to reach the Indicator 8 targets. School districts that have not yet conducted the Indicator 8 survey of parents bear responsibility for raising the level of Indicator 8 by focusing on these practices. School districts that already have conducted the surveys can compare the agreement rate of their parents with statewide results in order to make data-based decisions about integrating parent involvement into their school improvement plans.

Since 2000, the department has funded the Wisconsin Statewide Parent-Educator Initiative (WSPEI) as a parent involvement resource to school districts. Its goals are closely aligned with Indicator 8 improvement activities: to help parents and school districts find or create the resources that will help them foster positive working relationships that support shared decision-making and children's learning. The WSPEI parent liaisons employed by each of the CESAs are available to every school district to:

- Help school districts meet the Indicator 8 data requirements.
- Support individual school districts in building strategies for parent involvement.
- Collaborate with school districts to implement strategies, including training for educators and parents' using a research-based personnel development model.
- Mentor parents to become educated and positive participants in the IEP process.
- Train and mentor district-selected parent liaisons to support families and district parent involvement activities.

Because they are selected primarily for their ability to use constructive and positive communication with both parents and educators, WSPEI parent liaisons frequently facilitate parent advisory groups, information groups, and focus groups. It is not WSPEI's goals to replace or reinvent existing resources or to provide individual advocates at IEP meetings. Parent liaisons can increase Indicator 8 survey response rates for the school district by contacting parents to encourage and assist them to complete the survey.

WSPEI also serves as a source for parent-friendly materials about special education in Wisconsin. This role includes increased dissemination of information among parents, schools, organizations, agencies and communities through networking and personnel development. Among the information that can be found on the WSPEI website are materials developed by the department and its partners, such as the parents' rights brochure in English, Spanish, and Hmong, and an Introduction to Special Education for parents. The site also includes a list of the CESA parent liaisons, how to contact them, and linkages to each CESA parent page. A calendar of workshops, meetings, and trainings of interest to parents of children with disabilities is included as well. WSPEI collaborates closely with the IDEA-funded Parent Training and Information Center, Wisconsin FACETS; together they form the Parent Leadership Hub of the Wisconsin Personnel Development System for special education.

For more information about WSPEI, including how to order copies of special education publications for parents, see <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/sped/parent.html> or call the statewide project director, Mary Skadah, toll-free at 1-877-844-4925.

For more information about the Indicator 8 survey process, see the webcast at:
<http://media2.wi.gov/DPI/Viewer/?peid=c7032e8d-2ce9-4152-ae86-0621c57895b9>.

Questions regarding this bulletin can be directed to Patricia Bober, Parent Involvement Consultant, Special Education Team, Department of Public Instruction, 125 South Webster Street, P.O. Box 7841, Madison, WI 53707-7841, (608) 266-5194.

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This information update can also be accessed through the Internet:
<http://www.dpi.wi.gov/sped/bul08-03.html>